

Martin Luther

Eric Metaxas

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This sermon is based on Eric Metaxas's new book, Martin Luther: The Man Who Rediscovered God and Changed the World (Viking, New York, NY, 2017). All quotations are from that book.

Synopsis *(from the front book jacket)*

“On All Hallows’ Eve in 1517, a young monk named Martin Luther posted a document he hoped would spark an academic debate, but which instead ignited a conflagration that would forever destroy the world he knew. Five hundred years after Luther’s now famous Ninety-five Theses appeared, Eric Metaxas...paints a startling portrait of the wild figure whose adamant faith cracked the edifice of Western Christendom and dragged medieval Europe into the future. Written in riveting prose and impeccably researched, *Martin Luther* tells the searing tale of a humble man who, by bringing ugly truths to the highest seats of power, caused an explosion the sound of which is still ringing in our ears. Luther’s monumental faith and courage gave birth to the ideals of liberty, equality, and individualism that today lie at the heart of all modern life.”

Luther’s life before the monastery

- born about 11/10/1483, day before St. Martin’s Day; he was therefore named Martin
- father serious businessman in mining; some prosperity, in Mansfeld (now Germany)
- sent Martin to good private schools, with goal of becoming a lawyer
- 1505 started law school
- haunted by questions of God and eternity — only path to heaven trying to be good enough
- almost struck by lightning; prayed to St. Anne to save him; promised to become monk

Luther as a monk

- only sure path to heaven; full-time in holy order; goal to earn his way into heaven
- continually confessed every single sin; proved it couldn’t be done
- fasted and confessed, began to hate God because he found no answers
- thought he might find the answers in Scriptures; now available in Greek and Hebrew
- he was a good, loyal son of the church
- as he began to see the truth, he felt it was his responsibility to share what he knew with the church
- God in Christ offers himself freely to us while we are still sinners
- the place to share ideas/begin a debate, was to place on “bulletin board” of church door

Ninety-five Theses on Door of Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany

- he was not looking to make history, was hoping to provoke a debate about the truth he had found
- indulgences, paying money for forgiveness of sin, was prevalent at the time, and had become corrupt
- he was saying that it was wrong to lead people to believe that they could gain salvation by buying indulgences
- he said that it was only the righteousness of God that gets us into heaven, not what we do
- the Catholic church told him to be quiet
- he felt he had a responsibility to God to speak truth
- his ideas began to be published in German, in books for the common man, and became popular

The Diet of Worms

- in 1521 he was brought before the Emperor Charles V, the Papal Legate, and a gathering of church leaders
- he hoped he might be able to discuss his ideas; thought he was going to his death
- they asked him if he would recant what he had written, or not
- “...I am bound to the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen.”

The Man Who Created the Future

- opened a door in which people were free to rebel against their leaders
- opened a door in which people were obliged by God to take responsibility for themselves
- people were free to help those around them who could not help themselves
- no longer forced to accept poor spiritual or governmental leadership of those in authority
- we not only have freedom, but also responsibility to take these things into our own hands, trusting only in God
- encouraged people to depend more on God, to deepen their relationship with him personally
- encouraged them to increase their knowledge of the Scripture

500 years ago this month — began the Reformation

- a view of the Bible that was different than Rome’s, the existing Catholic Church at that time
- “Protestant” churches began – those that dissented against the powers in Rome

Discussion Questions

1. Why is the name, “The Man Who Created the Future” an appropriate one for Luther?
2. Since we are no longer “forced to accept poor spiritual or governmental leadership of those in authority,” what is our responsibility?
3. Out of everything in Luther’s life that he preached, he said that his main theme was, “God in Christ offers himself freely to us while we are still sinners.” React to this as basic truth.
4. Is there any time in your life when you have been given the choice of whether to stand up for God’s truth, or not? What did you do?